

# Nygaard Notes

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Greetings,

When we think about the U.S. withdrawal of troops from Iraq, it would be good to think about all three of the wars that are part of this discussion: The Mythical War, the Propaganda War, and the Real War. Two of these wars are nothing but illusion and, not surprisingly, are the ones that are discussed in public. The Real War is the only one that is not discussed in public. In this issue of the Notes, I take a brief look at all three of them.

Next week will be the 500<sup>th</sup> issue of Nygaard Notes. I find this difficult to believe, but I have been numbering each issue consecutively as I put them out, so it must be true. The first issue came out on September 5, 1998. Still going strong.

Coincidentally, it's also the beginning of a new year, so next week I'll publish my annual Nygaard Notes Year in Review issue, where I take a look at what we saw in the past year's worth of Notes. It helps me gather my thoughts, it marks the beginning of the new year, and it gives new subscribers a glimpse of what they missed and thus a hint of what to expect. That'll be next week. For now, a look at Iraq and the Three Wars.

Happy New Year!

Nygaard

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## The End of the Mythical War in Iraq

What I call the Mythical War is the one that everyone has been talking about in recent weeks, the "War in Iraq," the one that everyone says has recently "ended." I say it's mythical because the U.S. has not been at "war" with Iraq for years. What we have grown accustomed to calling a "war"—a word typically used to refer to hostilities between nations or states—pretty much ended with the fall of Baghdad on April 9<sup>th</sup>, 2003, three weeks after the U.S. launched its invasion. Since that time what has been going on in Iraq would more accurately be called a military occupation. Yet if we search major newspapers for the past six months for the phrase "occupation of Iraq" we find but 26 articles that include those words. The phrase "war in Iraq," in contrast, yields 1,781 articles. Propaganda needs dictate the terminology: It's far easier to "sell" a war—at least, a "defensive" war—to a population who must fund it and supply the soldiers, than it would be to "sell" a military occupation to those same people.

I noted in the last issue of the Notes that the U.S. has plans for a "robust" U.S. presence throughout the region, but what needs to be added here is the fact that even within Iraq the U.S. presence will remain large. As the New York Times reported on Dec 19, "the United States will continue to play a role in Iraq. The largest American Embassy in the world is located here, and in the wake of the military departure it is doubling in size—to roughly 16,000 people, most of them contractors. Under the authority of the ambassador will be fewer than 200 military personnel, to guard the embassy and oversee the sale of weapons to the Iraqi government."

The London Guardian on October 25<sup>th</sup> elaborated on this presence: "There are an estimated 400 arms deals between Baghdad and Washington, worth \$10 billion, with an additional 110 deals, worth \$900 million, reportedly pending. Many of these, as part of the deal, require US trainers, who would be working through the Office of Security Co-operation in the embassy. Bloomberg news reported that this 'newly established office will have a core staff of 160 civilians and uniformed military alongside 750 civilian contractors overseeing Pentagon assistance programmes, including military training. They will be guarded, fed and housed by 3,500 additional contract personnel', working in 10 offices around the country."

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**Myth** *from page 1* →→ In addition to the world's largest embassy, the Guardian notes that "there are also consulates in Basra, Mosul and Kirkuk, which have been allocated more than 1,000 staff each. Crucially, all these US staff, including military and security contractors, will have diplomatic immunity."

U.S. diplomatic outposts—complete with their immunity from Iraqi law—are often home to undercover C.I.A. operatives. While rarely officially acknowledged, the use of embassies as cover for espionage and covert activities is an open secret. Note the casual reference in a December 26<sup>th</sup> New York Times story on Pakistan: "Pakistan is also restricting visas to dozens of other embassy personnel, *from spies to aid workers*." Earlier this month the Lebanese press reported that "10 officers, *registered as diplomats* at the U.S. Embassy, served as CIA agents for three years in Lebanon." [Emphasis added.] It's also telling in this regard that the head of the C.I.A., General David Petraeus, was formerly the commanding general of the occupying forces in Iraq.

Much of what this ongoing contingent of military, intelligence, and "diplomatic" staff will be doing in Iraq will remain virtually unknown in the U.S. Within Iraq and the region, however, such things will likely be better known, and will continue to generate outrage and resistance despite the myth of U.S. "withdrawal" from Iraq.

So the eight-year-long phenomenon known as the "Iraq War" was mythical in two senses. In the first sense, it was not even a war, but an occupation. So a myth of a "war" was created to justify the ongoing occupation mobilization and its immense costs. In the second sense, the various rationales used to justify the occupation—officially, the "war"—were all based on the myth of a "defense" against: 1. Attack by Weapons of Mass Destruction, or; 2. Attack by terrorists, or; 3. Human rights abuses by a ruthless dictator. The ideas that make these myths seem real to so many people are promoted by another kind of war, a war of Propaganda, to which we now turn our attention. ◆

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## The Propaganda War

The so-called war in Iraq was seen, and still is seen by many, as a part of the Global War on Terror. I've been saying that the basic myth of U.S. military involvement in Iraq was the myth that the goal was to make the U.S. "safe." This same myth—of U.S. violence being deployed in the service of "safety"—has been deployed and will continue to be deployed to justify other uses of violence by the United States. The creation and maintenance of this mythology depends on the belief in a Global War on Terror, or what I call the Propaganda War. That is, to the extent that it is a "war" at all, it is a war created for the purpose of Propaganda.

The Global War on Terror is not a new phenomenon. Ronald Reagan spoke repeatedly about the "scourge of international terrorism" during his time as President. But until the end of the so-called Cold War with the Soviet Union, the fear of terror was not the most useful fear for Propaganda purposes; it was the fear of Communism. After there was no Soviet Union, for much of the 1990s, U.S. planners for the first time in four decades were without an official Great Fear. Since there was no longer any plausible threat to The World's Only Superpower, there was talk of a "Peace Dividend," a popular phrase which referred to the

economic benefits that would come about as a result of the demilitarization that so many expected to see.

After the demise of the Evil Empire, US planners pointed to other things to fear. For example, Richard Nixon had declared a "War on Drugs" in the 1970s, and that was still going on. But neither the fear of drugs nor any other fear appeared to be sufficient to mobilize the vast military resources needed to protect "U.S. interests" in what was now a global empire. As a result, according to a 2005 report by the World Council of Churches, "There was a reduction in [global] military spending at the end of the Cold War and the total downward trend culminated in 1998." For a few years the U.S. military budget also declined, at least until it started to creep up again at the end of the decade.

Then came the attacks of September 11, 2001.

Suddenly there was a new threat that seemed credible to almost everyone. After all, "they" had attacked us! Because "they" hate us! U.S. planners had a choice. One choice was to define the issue as a violation of law and pursue the perpetrators as criminals. The second choice was to declare war. Most of the world ↗↗↗

→→ favored the law-enforcement approach (as I reported at the time in “Act of War? Or Crime Against Humanity? The World Weighs In.” Nygaard Notes Number 132, November 16, 2001)

The fateful choice to declare war ensured that the dynamic of the Cold War would not be consigned to history—as many people desired—but instead would be reborn as a Global War on Terror. The original Cold War, put in place after World War II, was “the transformative process that ended in the ultimate demise of the New Deal state with its emphasis on social spending and ushered in the militarist ‘National Security State,’” in the words of historian James M. Carter.

This rebirth of the Cold War was openly discussed by U.S. planners, if not often among the general population. Writing in 2002 for the U.S. Army War College journal *Parameters*, retired Colonel David Jablonsky, professor of national security affairs at the College, wrote:

“Because of the terrorist attacks [of Sept. 11 2001], the institutional form of the US government is changing as America sorts out its grand strategic functions in a rapidly changing world. This should come as no surprise. The same process occurred at the beginning of the Cold War when the United States enlarged its definition of national security. . .

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“The new threat assures the continued existence if not growth of the national security state and will certainly cause increased centralization and intrusiveness of the US government. . . Above all, [the Cold War] is a reminder of the importance of patience, perseverance, and endurance in the face of protracted conflict without the prospect of clear victory.”

Jablonsky then goes on to stress the importance of “a mix of US preponderance and cooperative security that will allow a more effective integration of foreign and

domestic national security issues emphasizing minimization of both cost and risk—all necessary to sustain US public support for another grand strategic vision of a protracted twilight struggle.”

The Colonel’s prophetic words from 2002 may require a bit of decoding. “US preponderance” means maintaining an Imperial-sized military. “Cooperative security” means retaining the power to invoke whatever ad-hoc “coalitions of the willing” may be needed. For the foreseeable future it looks like this will be NATO. And when Jablonsky refers to “a protracted twilight struggle,” he is referring to a new Cold War.

Key to our current discussion is an understanding of what is “necessary to sustain US public support” for another few decades of militarism. Gore Vidal pointed out, in reference to the first Cold War, that the program of the National Security State required U.S. planners to “mobilize the entire American society to fight the terrible specter of communism.” Now the terrible specter is terrorism, which provides the irrational, barbaric, cunning enemy without which the National Security State cannot exist. An enemy with whom we cannot negotiate. An enemy who can be held at bay only with overwhelming violence. An enemy who may be lurking among “us.” An enemy whose cunning is such that we need a near-limitless capacity to conduct covert operations, up to and including imprisonment and execution without trial of anyone suspected of being one of “them.”

Does such an enemy actually exist? It doesn’t really matter. Yale professor John Lewis Gaddis, known as “the dean of Cold War historians,” was referring to Cold War U.S. policy toward the USSR when he wrote that it “has been the product, not so much of what the Russians have done, or of what has happened elsewhere in the world, but of internal forces operating within the United States.”

Now, as then, the regeneration of the National Security State depends less on the actual threat than it does on the *perception* of threat, which is a function of Propaganda on many levels. The effect, if not the intent, of declaring a Global War on Terror is to convince the domestic population that we need an endless war to beat back an endless threat. And this is why I refer to the Global War on Terror as The Propaganda War. But there is one more war—a real war—yet to consider. ♦

## The Real War

When I was just out of high school I was struggling to understand inequality. How is it that some countries, like my own, are fantastically wealthy while others are fantastically poor? Flailing around looking for answers, I ran across the work of a man named Andre Gunder Frank. This led me to explore what was called “Dependency Theory,” and later on I learned about something called “World Systems Analysis.” I started paying attention to the work of people like Immanuel Wallerstein, Samir Amin, and others.

Dependency theory is based on a few key concepts. One is that there are two sets of nation-states in the world. One set is dominant, and is composed of the rich states, often represented by the members of the Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Then there are the dependent states, which are the poorer countries of Latin America, Asia, and Africa, mostly. A second concept is that the richer countries are stronger than the poorer countries. A third concept is that both sets of states are embedded in a system which, for the most part, serves the interests of the rich states.

Speaking about the development of dependency theory, Professor Vincent Ferraro of Mount Holyoke College says that the theorists were suggesting that “poverty [is] a direct consequence of the evolution of the international political economy into a fairly rigid division of labor which favors the rich and penalizes the poor.”

**Poverty is a direct consequence of the evolution of the international political economy into a fairly rigid division of labor which favors the rich and penalizes the poor.**

“Dependency theory,” says Ferraro, “attempts to explain the present underdeveloped state of many nations in the world by examining the patterns of interactions among nations and by arguing that inequality among nations is an intrinsic part of those interactions.” He goes on to say that:

“[D]ependency models rest upon the assumption that economic and political power are heavily concentrated and centralized in the industrialized countries. . . . If this assumption is valid, then any distinction between economic and political power is spurious: governments will take whatever steps are necessary to protect private economic interests, such as those held by multinational corporations.”

(I won’t even attempt to summarize World Systems Analysis here, as I plan to save that for a future issue of Nygaard Notes. For now I’ll just quote from the book “World Systems Analysis: An Introduction,” by one of its leading proponents, Immanuel Wallerstein, who says that World Systems Analysis is “a fundamental protest against the ways in which we have thought that we know the world.”)

My point in bringing all this up is that what I call The Real War is the war that is needed to maintain the unjust and unequal system about which I was so outraged as a youngster and about which I am, if anything, even more outraged now.

### Enforcing the Rules

The Real War would probably be better understood as a bunch of wars—seemingly unconnected unless they are said to be a part of a “Cold War” or a “Global War on Terror,” or some other Propaganda setup. As Ferraro says, “governments will take whatever steps are necessary” to “protect their interests.” This explains—in fact, makes inevitable—the numerous deployments, threats, and attacks on other nations that are necessary to maintain something that I call, for short, the U.S. Empire. In an Imperial system, such as the one currently (sort of) headed by the United States, there must be a clear understanding of who gives the orders and who takes them. In such a system, the biggest threat to the Order-Givers is insubordination. And the thread that ties together all of the wars waged or supported by the United States in recent decades—from Grenada to Nicaragua to Iraq to Afghanistan—is the threat of a nation breaking out of the “World Order” favored by the United States.

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Real War from page 4

I wrote about much of this in my Empire Series, which ran in Nygaard Notes Number 443-445 at the end of 2009. [www.nygaardnotes.org/issues/nn0443.html](http://www.nygaardnotes.org/issues/nn0443.html) No need to repeat all that so, for now, I'll just stress the importance of one word and one phrase. The word is "defense," and the phrase is "U.S. interests." The U.S., as a global power, has "interests" all over the globe, and must commit serious resources to "defending" those interests against any nation that seems as if it might threaten them.

As an example, I'll harken back to 2009, when I mentioned in these pages an Associated Press news story about the threat of Iran (some things never change, eh?). At that time, Iran had test-fired some missiles, with Iranian spokespeople noting that "Iranian missiles are able to target any place that threatens Iran." The Associated Press report on this event bore the headline, "Iran Tests Advanced Missiles, Raising More Concern." The "concern" arises in part, according to the AP, from the fact that "U.S. military bases in the Middle East" would now be "within striking distance" of Iranian missiles.

This story only makes sense if we understand why there

are U.S. military bases in the Middle East to begin with. They are there to "defend" some very important "U.S. interests" in the region. Iran's efforts to deter attack threatens to undermine "the system" in the region. The geopolitics of the area says that an independent and powerful Iran may lead a movement away from the imperial system and toward a more independent, regional system. Iraq was posing a similar threat, which goes a lot further in explaining the U.S. attack on that country than all the talk of WMD or terrorism.

Now, just three weeks after the United States "withdrew" from Iraq, the Seattle Times reports President Obama's plans to "reshape the armed forces after a decade of war" by "refocusing Pentagon spending to counter dangers from China and Iran." And thus are the seeds of the next war planted. We don't really know if those seeds of Imperial War will wither in the ground or grow into more attacks and occupations. That script has not been written.

It's urgent that we work to stop whatever war is being conducted in our name, whether it be a Mythical War in Iraq or a Propaganda War Against Terror. But if we want to address the root cause of war in the modern era—maybe any era—we would do well to challenge the dynamic of the Real War, and that is the ongoing Imperial War for control of the world's wealth. ♦

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## The Suffering Of the People of Iraq

In a testament to U.S. callousness, we don't even have numbers to quantify how many people in Iraq died as a result of the U.S. invasion and occupation. Estimates range from the absurdly-low number (still mind-bogglingly huge) of 50,000 up to more than one million. And almost nowhere in the media was the toll of 12 years of economic sanctions—1991-2003—even mentioned. Estimates of Iraqi deaths related to the sanctions range from 170,000 to over 1.5 million.

Numbers don't tell the story. Nothing can really tell the story, but here is an excerpt from the newsletter "The Anti-Empire Report," by William Blum from January 3, 2012. It hints at the story that we have not been getting for the past 20 years. When the history books are written about the U.S. invasion of Iraq, says Blum, they can relate,

*"with numerous graphic photos, how the modern, educated, advanced nation of Iraq was reduced to a quasi failed state; how the Americans, beginning in 1991, bombed for 12 years, with one dubious excuse or another; then invaded, then occupied, overthrew the government, tortured without inhibition, killed wantonly, ... how the people of that unhappy land lost everything — their homes, their schools, their electricity, their clean water, their environment, their neighborhoods, their mosques, their archaeology, their jobs, their careers, their professionals, their state-run enterprises, their physical health, their mental health, their health care, their welfare state, their women's rights, their religious tolerance, their safety, their security, their children, their parents, their past, their present, their future, their lives ... More than half the population either dead, wounded, traumatized, in prison, internally displaced, or in foreign exile ... The air, soil, water, blood, and genes drenched with depleted uranium ... the most awful birth defects ... unexploded cluster bombs lying anywhere in wait for children to pick them up ... a river of blood running alongside the Euphrates and Tigris ... through a country that may never be put back together again."*

## “Quote” of the Week

The Atlantic Magazine posted a story on December 22<sup>nd</sup> by historian Toby C. Jones entitled “Don't Stop at Iraq: Why the U.S. Should Withdraw From the Entire Persian Gulf.” The opening paragraph is this week’s “Quote” of the Week:

*“The U.S. is finally drawing down its military presence from Iraq, but why stop there? Why not reduce or outright remove our military presence from the entire Persian Gulf? The U.S. has been waging war in the Gulf for more than two and a half decades, since it took up arms against Iran in the closing stages of the Iran-Iraq war. The human and environmental costs have been catastrophic. The presumptive gains of what has amounted to one long war have proven elusive at best. More often than not, the justifications for war have been either ill-conceived or manufactured. The Persian Gulf today is hardly stable or secure. But permanent war, and our militarization of the Gulf, isn't so much a reflection of regional instability as it is the cause.”*

I don't really recommend the entire article, as it fails to make a strong moral argument, but if you want to read it, look HERE: [www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/12/dont-stop-at-iraq-why-the-us-should-withdraw-from-the-entire-persian-gulf/250389/](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2011/12/dont-stop-at-iraq-why-the-us-should-withdraw-from-the-entire-persian-gulf/250389/)

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## Bonus “Quote” of the Week

On January 3 the New York Times ran an opinion piece by John Tirman, author of the book “The Deaths of Others: The Fate of Civilians in America’s Wars.” He wrote:

*“The consequences of how we fight wars reveals a great deal about how and why others fight us. In Iraq, for example, the causes of the Sunni resistance were often attributed to lost social status; the role of American violence against civilians early in the conflict was rarely discussed. Yet many of the captured Iraqis said they were defending their communities by resisting the occupying forces. Roughing up, detaining or killing suspected enemy fighters—as the coalition forces did in countless operations—prompted some Iraqis to take up the gun, the I.E.D. and the suicide bomb. The more violence from the occupiers, the more ferocious their reaction.”*

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